

Groups demand new approach to asylum seekers and refugees

Following last week's historic High Court ruling that declared the Malaysia refugee swap deal invalid, Australia's community sector is calling on the Australian Government to abandon the current fixation with offshore 'solutions' and to establish a just and humane approach to Australia's response to people seeking asylum.

Leaders of Australia's major charities, social service groups have been joined by many other concerned organisations to sign a statement urging both major political parties to de-politicise policies about the treatment of asylum seekers by immediately abandoning the policy of offshore processing and focusing on policies that uphold Australia's human rights obligations domestically and internationally.

Instead of considering changes to the agreement with Malaysia or to the Migration Act, or looking at other offshore solutions, the groups urge Australia to use the High Court ruling as a definitive turning point for the way we have approached the treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia over the past decade. The High Court ruling should be a watershed to reform Australia's stance on asylum seekers in line with our international obligations.

As a group, the signatories to this Statement call for:

- Both major political parties respect the full implications of the high court ruling, including that neither indefinite detention nor sending asylum seekers to uncertainty in other countries can be presented as a just or credible response to the needs of people seeking refuge and protection in Australia.
- The Australian Government to take leadership on this issue and use the ruling as an opportunity to reframe the national debate about refugees and asylum seekers, accepting that the majority of asylum seekers who have entered Australia by boat have been found to need protection from persecution, and therefore that the vulnerability of asylum seekers must be a primary consideration in any government response to people movement.
- The Australian Government to immediately rule out offshore processing and mandatory detention, and allow people seeking asylum to be placed in the community whilst waiting for a decision, other than in exceptional circumstances.
- The Australian Government to immediately move to process all asylum seekers onshore. Instead of spending substantial funds deporting people overseas and building facilities offshore, the Australian Government should enable Australia's community sector to support and resettle people humanely and effectively, as an appropriate, sensitive and least expensive solution to Australia's humanitarian responsibilities.
- The Australian Government to increase our refugee and humanitarian intake in the region and honour its commitment to resettle the 4000 refugees from Malaysia.



Increasing Australia's intake of refugees from the region is one of the most effective, economic and humane ways to respond to people smuggling.

- The Australian Government to continue to work towards a regional solution to the plight of people seeking asylum. Australia should build on the progress achieved through the Bali Process this year to work with governments in Asia-Pacific and beyond to work towards fundamental change to the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in the region.

The groups urge all political parties and Members of Parliament to stop using policies regarding asylum seekers to foster misunderstanding, social division and distrust, and instead use it as an opportunity to get on with the job of fulfilling Australia's commitment under the Refugee Convention to treat people humanely, process them onshore, and promote the better treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in our region.

As a country, we must adopt just and humane policies on refugees and asylum seekers and in so doing raise the level of debate and treatment of some of the most vulnerable people in the world. Only then will Australia be able to hold its head high in the international community as a nation with a commitment to human rights and a deep appreciation of the plight of people seeking a safe haven from persecution and a better way of life.

Find out more including full list of signatories on the [ACOSS website](http://www.acoss.org.au).